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ABSTRACT

Fifteen high school English teachers and 544 students in their classes participated in a study to determine how well teachers assess student reading habits and attitudes and to compare the accuracy of their judgments with those of student-peers. Each student was administered a measure of reading ability and of reading attitude; additional data gathered for each student included grades received in previous English and social studies classes. Reading habits were measured through a self-report indicating the number of books read by the student during the previous six months. The students were asked to list the three classmates who had the most positive attitudes and the three with the most negative attitudes toward reading. Teachers were asked to rate the reading attitude of each class member as "positive," "moderate," or "negative." Results showed that reading attitude and reading habit were separable from measures of academic ability, that the ability of both teachers and student-peers to assess reading attitude correlated more highly with English grades than with measures of reading habit or attitude, and that the reading attitude measure used in the study was able to predict student reading habit with more accuracy than were either teachers or students. (FL)

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Teacher Prediction of Students' Reading Attitudes: An Examination of Teacher Judgment Compared to Student-Peer Judgment in Assessing Student Reading Attitude and Habit

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Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Most secondary school curricula articulate reading related goals that include the development of reading ability as well as the development of positive reading attitudes and habits. Recently, the minimum competency movement has focused a great deal of attention on attending to students' reading abilities. It is unusual, however, for equal

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attention to be devoted to student reading attitude, even though research (Bullen, 1972 and Mikulecky, 1976) indicates that the average reading attitude of students drops with each successively higher grade from fourth grade through twelfth grade.

It is often assumed by teachers and school administrators that if students can be taught to read more fluently, the positive growth of reading attitude and habit will follow. Such an assumption may not be valid, even though it appeals to the "common sense" argument that one needs to be able to read well before one can enjoy reading. Research done to examine the relationship of general satisfaction with school to academic ability found only a negligible relationship between the two constructs (Jackson and LaHaderne, 1967). Jackson and Lahaderne also found teachers' predictions of students' satisfaction to be more accurate predictors of student academic success than of student satisfaction. The same difficulty of teachers mistaking ability for attitude may exist in the specific area of reading development. Reading related research needs to be directed simultaneously toward reading ability, habit, and attitude. Rather than assume that increased reading ability will lead to increased positive reading attitudes and habits, researchers need to ask:

What are the relationships between reading attitude and habit on the one hand and reading and academic ability on the other hand? If it turns out that reading attitude and habit are separable from ability, the constructs may each have to be attended to by teachers. If this is the case, one must ask:

How well do teachers assess student reading attitude and habit? and,

How accurate, compared to a teacher's personal assessment of reading attitude and habit, are the assessments of reading attitude measures and assessments by a students' peers?

For research purposes, the general questions of relationship and prediction outlined above were reduced to several specific working hypotheses. These working hypotheses follow below.

Hypotheses of Relationship

1. The construct of reading attitude, as measured by the Mikulecky Behavioral Reading Attitude Measure (Mikulecky, 1976) is separable (less than 10% shared variance) from reading ability as measured by the (a) vocabulary subtest of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test Level II, Form W (1968), and separable from grades received in both (b) English classes and (c) Social Studies Classes.

2. The construct of reading habit, as measured by the number of books read by students during the previous six months, is separable (less than 10% shared variance) from reading ability, as measured by (a) the vocabulary subtest of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test Level II, Form W and separable from grades received in both (b) English and (c) Social Studies classes.

Hypotheses of Prediction

1. The assessment of reading habit, as measured by books read during the previous six months, will correlate significantly more highly ($p < .05$) with reading attitude scores (MBRAM score) than with teacher assessment of student reading attitude.

2. Assessment of student reading attitude by a students' peers will correlate significantly more highly with measured reading attitude (MBRAM score) and reading habit (books read) than will assessment of student reading attitude by teachers.

Method

Subjects

The subjects of this study were 544 students in the required English classes (grades 10-11) of two midwestern high schools and the 15 English teachers of these students. The classes were designed to be heterogeneous in ability. High school seniors were eliminated from the study since elective courses and the attrition of high school drop outs made the population more homogeneous.

The English teachers involved in the study ranged from first year teachers to one twenty-two year veteran teacher. Since testing occurred throughout the month of November, each teacher had from two to three months to become acquainted with student reading ability, habit, and attitude.

Instruments and Data

Over a period of approximately two weeks in November each student was administered a measure of reading ability and of reading attitude. The vocabulary subtest of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test Level II, Form W (1968) had been administered to all students by the reading specialist as a screening device to identify problem readers. At the time of data gathering, English teachers had no access to test results. Reading attitude was measured by the

Mikulecky Behavioral Reading Attitude Measure (MBRAM) (Mikulecky, 1976), a twenty item measure validated against several existing formal and informal indicators of reading attitude and demonstrating a test-retest reliability of .91.

In addition other data were gathered for each student. These included:

Grade received in previous English class,
Grade received in previous Social Studies class, and
Number of books read during previous six months
(self report included summer months).

After all data had been collected, teachers validated the accuracy of student self reports.

Students were also asked to assess the reading attitude of their peers. This was accomplished by asking students to list the three students in class who had the most positive attitudes toward reading and the three students having the most negative attitudes toward reading. Lists were tabulated and any student identified as having a positive attitude by at least 25% of the class received a score of 3. Any student identified as having a negative attitude by 25% of a class received a score of 1. All other students received scores of 2. Class breakdowns were approximately 20% - 40% - 20% for positive, moderate, and negative attitudes.

Teacher assessment of student attitude was accomplished by asking teachers to rate each class member on reading attitude as positive (3), moderate (2) or negative (1).

Data Analysis

Variables were initially analyzed by computing degree of correlation and percentage of shared variance using Spearman's Rho (Guilford, 1965, p.305). Correlations between MBRAM scores and measures of ability such as grades and vocabulary test scores were examined to determine the relationship between reading attitude and academic ability. Correlations between the number of books read and measures of ability were examined to determine the relationship between reading habit and academic ability.

In order to determine the relative effectiveness of teacher assessment of student reading attitude as compared to peer assessment of student reading attitude, the Hotelling formula (Guilford, 1965, p. 190) was used to compute significant differences ($p < .05$) between correlations. The following computations were performed:

1) Teacher Assessment/MBRAM Score vs Peer Assessment/MBRAM Score
2) Teacher Assessment/Books Read vs Peer Assessment/Books Read

To compare the effectiveness of teacher assessment of reading attitude compared to MBRAM assessment of reading attitude in predicting reading habit, the following computation was performed.

3) MBRAM/Books Read vs Teacher Assessment/Books Read.

Results

Computation of correlations between variables revealed that in most cases reading attitude, as measured by the MBRAM and reading habit, as measured by Books read during a six months period were

found to be separable from measures of reading or academic ability such as standardized test scores or grades, (See Table I). Constructs were defined as separable if less than 10% variance were shared. The selection of a 10% criterion level was arbitrary and could conceivably be raised to a higher level. Standardized tests use minimum correlations of .70 or 49% shared variance to establish that a test is validly measuring the construct it claims to measure.

As Table I reveals, reading attitude scores only shared 3.4% and 3.8% variance with English and Social Studies grades respectively. The Stanford vocabulary score shared 7% variance with the reading attitude measure. Reading habit, as defined by books read, showed similar separableness from grades (3.4% shared variance with English grades and 4.3% shared variance with Social Studies grades). The vocabulary score gave evidence of 11.7% shared variance with books read. This is above the pre-set 10% criterion level, but barely so. Habit and ability seem to be slightly less separable than attitude and ability.

INSERT TABLE I ABOUT HERE

Since, for the most part, reading attitude and habit have been shown to be separable from measures of ability, the teacher's ability to assess student reading attitude gains in diagnostic importance. Table I reveals that teacher assessment shares only about 10% variance with MBRAM scores (10.4% shared variance) and books read by students (10.1% shared variance). These figures are slightly lower than the

TABLE I

SPEARMAN'S RHO CORRELATIONS, AND % SHARED VARIANCE BETWEEN MEASURES OF ATTITUDE, HABIT, AND ABILITY

N=554	MBRAM	English Grade	Social Studies Grade	Books Read	Peer Assess-ment	Stanford Vocabu-lary	Teacher Assess-ment
MBRAM	1.000						
English Grade	.1860 3.4%	1.000					
Social Studies Grade	.1961 3.8%	.5392 29.1%	1.000				
Books Read	.5766 33.2%	.1763 3.1%	.2079 4.3%	1.000			
Peer Assessment	.3962 15.7%	.3975 15.8%	.3425 11.7%	.3388 11.5%	1.000		
Stanford Vocabulary	.2651 7%	.2363 5.6%	.3574 12.7%	.3419 11.7%	.2145 4.6%	1.000	
Teacher Assessment	.3231 10.4%	.3399 11.6%	.3160 9.9%	.3186 10.1%	.5152 26.5%	.2361 5.6%	1.000

shared variance of peer assessment and MBRAM scores (15.7% shared variance) and books read (11.5% shared variance). When these differences in correlations were examined using the Hotelling formula, however, no statistically significant differences were found between teacher and student assessments of reading attitude.

This suggests that the effectiveness of both teachers and a student's peers in predicting reading attitude and habit is quite low. For example, the shared variance between MBRAM scores and books read was 33.2% while the percentage between teacher assessment and books read was only 10.1%. The Hotelling formula was used to compute the difference between these two relationships. It produced a t of 6.41 (N-554) which is significant at the $p < .0001$ level. The MBRAM measure is a much better predictor of student reading habit than is teacher assessment. As a matter of fact, both teacher assessments and student assessments of reading attitude correlated more highly with English grades than they did with either MBRAM scores or books read.

Discussion and Conclusions

The "common sense" notion that increasing reading ability will lead to increases in positive reading attitudes and habits appears to be inaccurate. There is a slight positive relationship between attitude and habit on the one hand and academic and reading ability on the other hand, but the relationship is so extremely slight the constructs can be described as separable. Grades gave evidence of under 5% shared variance with reading attitude and habit. Whatever it is that we are

rewarding and providing incentives for in English and Social Studies classes, it does not seem to be developing reading habits or attitudes. Reading ability test scores demonstrated slightly higher correlations with reading attitude and habit, but the relationship was still so slight that the constructs must be viewed as separable.

The implications of these findings for teachers are great. If the goals of education are to develop capable readers who are likely to continue reading once out of school, then teachers must directly address a student's reading habits and attitudes as well as his or her reading abilities. This implies a sensitivity on the part of teachers to which students are reading or not reading, which students have positive or negative reading attitudes. The findings of this study suggest that teachers do not currently possess that sensitivity. When asked to assess student reading attitude, teachers were able to demonstrate only about 10% shared variance with measured reading attitude and habit. Their predictions correlated more highly with English grades than they did with either indications of reading habit or attitude. It was hypothesized that students might better know the reading attitudes of their peers than would teachers. The numerical correlations of student assessment with MBRAM scores and books read were higher than were correlations of teacher assessment with attitude or habit, but the differences did not achieve statistical significance. Student assessments also correlated more highly with English grades than with attitude scores or books read. It is possible that both teachers and students are so biased by the continued ability-only feedback they receive that accurately assessing another's reading habits and attitudes is extremely

difficult. The assessments of teachers and students agreed more with each other (26.5% shared variance) than they did with any measure of reading ability, attitude, or habit.

The reading attitude measure used in the study was able to predict student reading habit (33.2% shared variance) with a good deal more accuracy than either teachers or students. If teachers are to directly address the need to develop positive reading habits and attitudes, it seems that they would benefit from the diagnostic information of reading attitude measures as a balance to existing biases.

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